

For Businesses

# Breastfeeding: The Best Investment...

*Worksite support  
of breastfeeding  
employees improves  
your bottom line.*



When an employee returns from maternity leave, she wants to be productive and profitable...

And a good mother.

That's why so many women are choosing to breastfeed their babies. Breastfeeding keeps babies healthy and helps them grow to their potential. Breastfeeding helps moms and babies stay close even when they are separated much of the day. The World Health Organization, the American Academy of Pediatrics<sup>1</sup>, and other health organizations, recommend exclusive breastfeeding as the preferred source of infant nutrition, exclusively through the first 6 months of life and with appropriate complementary foods through at least the first year.

### *When women breastfeed, they are more productive on the job.*

- They worry less about the baby
- They miss less work due to illness for themselves or the baby.

A study in two Southern California corporations found twice as many absences related to a sick baby among employees who did not breastfeed compared with those who did. Among babies who were never sick, 86% were breastfed.<sup>2</sup>

### *Breastfeeding can mean greater profitability for employers.*

The fastest growing segment of today's labor force is mothers of infants and young children. Helping these women continue breastfeeding after they return to the worksite can result in:

- Less employee turnover
- Faster return from maternity leave
- Less employee absenteeism
- Reduced overtime or temporary worker costs
- Lower utilization of employee health care benefits

Over one year, Aetna estimates a savings of U.S.\$1,435 on medical claims and of three days of sick leave per breast-fed baby. That's a total savings of \$108,737—an almost 3-to-1 return on their investment in a worksite breastfeeding support program through medical claims alone.<sup>3</sup>

### *Employer support of breastfeeding is reflected in:*

- Improved employee morale and loyalty
- Improved image as family-friendly
- Improved recruiting for personnel
- Improved retention of employees after childbirth

Employees at Los Angeles Department of Water and Power recounted the following benefits of a Corporate Lactation Program:

- 86% state it eased their transition back to work
- 83% feel positive about their employer
- 71% took less time off since being in the program
- 67% were less worried about family problems
- 33% felt that the program enabled them to return to work sooner than anticipated<sup>4</sup>

### *A Growing number of companies recognize the benefits of breastfeeding.*

Hundreds of companies in the U.S. alone have begun worksite breastfeeding support programs. Company returns on their program investment have been substantial.

Sanvita, a worksite lactation support program, has helped companies achieve a \$1.50 to \$4.50 return for each dollar invested.<sup>5</sup>



Companies successfully implementing worksite lactation support programs include Cigna, Eastman Kodak, Eli Lilly, Aetna, the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the University of Minnesota School of Nursing, the Kentucky Cabinet for Health Services and the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

## *Breastfeeding support can be a powerful contributor to worksite wellness*

Breastfeeding provides numerous well-documented health benefits to infants and mothers. These benefits are greatest when human milk is the baby's primary food for at least the first 6 months of life.

Infectious illnesses common in childhood, such as diarrhea, ear infections, and the common cold, are less frequent and less severe among infants who are breastfed. This is especially important for infants and young children in group day care settings, where the risk of infections is increased.

Babies who are breastfed also have a lower risk for death, meningitis, childhood cancers, diabetes, obesity, and developmental delays.

Mothers who breastfeed reduce their risk for breast cancer, ovarian cancer and osteoporosis.

- In some instances, a lack of support has kept a mother from returning to an employer or forced her to resign her position.
- In many other instances, worksite barriers keep a mother from even starting breastfeeding, eliminating the opportunity for mother or baby to receive the unique and vital benefits of breastfeeding.

Policies and programs specifically designed to support breastfeeding women are a crucial factor in worksite support. A written policy promotes a corporate environment supportive of breastfeeding.

*"Some managers seem to think that participation in wellness programs will interfere with job performance. In fact, such programs help people get their jobs done." — Malcolm Forbes*

## *Components for worksite breastfeeding support programs*

To maintain her milk supply, a mother must breastfeed or express milk during the day.

Minimal conditions to support breastfeeding:

- Allowing a 20 to 30 minute break both morning and afternoon for a mother to nurse her infant or express her milk.
- Providing a private, clean area for breastfeeding or milk expression.
- Providing a safe, clean, and cool place or container to store expressed breastmilk.
- Having a clean, safe water source and sink nearby for washing hands and equipment.

Whether a worksite has one breastfeeding woman or one hundred, acceptance of basic breastfeeding needs is the bottom line for support.

Additional worksite provisions for maximal support:

- Flexible work schedules, job sharing, or part-time employment.
- On- or near-site childcare facilities.

### **Breastfeeding, Baby's Risk of Illness, and Maternal Absenteeism.<sup>6</sup>**

Baby illness	Typical time away from work	Impact of breastfeeding
Diarrhea (not hospitalized)	1-2 days	cuts risk by one half to one-third
Ear Infection	1-2 days	cuts risk by two-thirds to three-fourths
Respiratory infection	2-7 days	cuts risk by three-fourths

## *Employer support is critical for successful breastfeeding.*

Worksite barriers to breastfeeding create added stress for a mother trying to do her best for both her employer and her baby.

- Breastfeeding education and support programs available during pregnancy, maternity leave, and after return to the worksite.
- Coverage of breastfeeding consultation services and supplies through the company's wellness program or health benefits plan.

Corporate lactation programs can help women breastfeed as much and as long as women who are not employed outside the home.<sup>7</sup>

### *Implementing a worksite lactation support program*

Businesses support breastfeeding employees in many ways, often based on employee need and numbers.

- A flexible policy may be all that is required when employee need is low.
- More extensive facilities, including a specialized pumping or breastfeeding room, may be appropriate with larger numbers of breastfeeding employees.
- Offering classes and support groups can be useful regardless of workforce size, especially when spouses can participate as well.
- Where large numbers of employees participate, many companies contract out for such programs, services and supplies.

### *Resources:*

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 Thompson PE, Bell P. Issues Compr Pediatr Nurs 1997;20:1-9.

### *References:*

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2. Cohen R, Mrtek MB, Mrtek RG. Am J Health Promot 1995; 10:148-53.
3. Danyliw NQ. U.S. News and World Report, Dec. 15, 1997, p. 79-81.
4. Sanvita Programs introductory pamphlet. McHenry, IL: Medela Inc., 1993.
5. Sanvita Programs introductory pamphlet. McHenry, IL: Medela Inc., 1994.
6. Bailey, D. The Potential Health Care Cost of Not Breastfeeding. Pamphlet. Lexington-Fayette County (KY, USA) Health Department, 1993.
7. Cohen R, Mrtek MB. Am J Health Promot 1994; 8:436-441.

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants are the health professional specializing in breastfeeding. They can provide guidance and assistance in establishing breastfeeding support systems for employees and providing clinical lactation therapy should problems arise.

### **For more information, contact:**

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### **For local assistance, contact:**

